



MASTER FILE

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MEMORANDUM FOR Brian Monaghan
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Attention: Decennial Design, Policy, and Management Branch

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Subject: Observation of Block Canvassing in Tampa, FL

Introduction

The Census 2000 Block Canvassing for Wave 1 was conducted in various parts of the United States. This is an important step in the census to produce an accurate Master Address File (MAF) in areas with city-style addresses. I was able to observe block canvassing in Tampa, FL. on February 1-2, 1999.

My original goal was to observe this operation in hard-to-enumerate areas, and preferably with a Spanish-speaking enumerator. Because I represent Decennial Statistical Studies Division on the Planning Database team, I wanted to see if hard-to-enumerate areas had unique challenges in block canvassing. Overall, operations seemed to be running fairly smoothly, in spite of the fact that the Tampa office is trying to make up for a lag of one week due to recruiting difficulties. One of the issues brought to my attention during my visit dealt with the addition and deletion of housing units. This occurs quite frequently, and the listers are adding many pages of addresses to their books.

Specific Observations

The Area Manager happened to be at the Tampa office during my visit, and she provided some valuable insights and suggestions, especially regarding recruiting, which seemed to be one of the

major problems their office was experiencing, and probably contributed to their starting the operations almost a week late. There needs to be quicker approval of non-citizen enumerators, especially in linguistically-isolated areas. Her area covers the Miami office, and she indicated that even though the office is allowed to hire non-citizen enumerators on a case-by-case basis, this usually requires approval at such a high level that by the time it is obtained, it is too late to take advantage of these enumerators that speak Spanish, Haitian-Creole, etc. Recruiters are required to geocode the home addresses of the recruits so that enumerators can be chosen from the areas in which they live. However, this proves to be a daunting task to these recruiters, many of whom do not have the sufficient experience or time to do this.

One of the major problems with the recruiting at this particular office is the relatively low pay. While the enumerator pay is higher than the fast-food establishments, it is on a relatively equal level as that of the telemarketing and call centers which are prevalent in the area. However, these centers also offer benefits with their pay, and have permanent positions available. The management in Tampa recognizes this problem, and suggests that the pay be increased to be competitive with local businesses. There also exists another situation—just over the bridge in another area the enumerators are paid at a higher rate, so many potential recruits do not want to work in Tampa or Hillsborough County, but rather Pinellas County.

I observed some canvassing operations in the city of Tampa. The Field Operations Supervisor (FOS) drove me to a couple of different areas. In the first one, he showed me some of the difficulties that the listers face. There seemed to be one of every kind of challenge that could be in a given block. There was a house that seemed to be divided into two different housing units. On the same property, there was another housing unit that had numbers on two of the doors. There were four mailboxes in the front of the house. We found numbers for three of the housing units, and it was difficult to determine to which road the houses belonged, since they were on a corner. There were obvious entrances to each street. In this situation, the lister would rely on the occupant dweller of the housing unit. We saw partially boarded-up multi-unit structures, vacant lots, abandoned homes, and even a house that we identified as a fraternity simply by the Greek letters on the front.

One situation obviously contributed to the increase in adds and deletes. An entire trailer park used to be addressed to the main street, but now all of the smaller streets within the trailer park have their own names, and the trailers are identified by these streets with new numbers. The lister added all of the housing units under the new name and number and deleted all of the old ones. Could the lister simply have corrected the address listings?

The FOS mentioned that occasionally all of the addresses in a block are correct, and there are no adds or deletes, except they are all listed under an incorrect block number, which requires the lister to delete all of them and add them under the correct block number. The FOS said that this occurs about 10 percent of the time. This might be due to an incorrect MAF, or geocoding problems.

I spent an afternoon with a Spanish-speaking enumerator and his crew leader (who also speaks Spanish). During the listing of an apartment complex, we were unable to find a manager on-site, and so the lister simply went to each building of four units each, checked the address of the housing unit, and verified that the list was correct. Since I mostly spoke Spanish with this enumerator, I don't know how good his English is, but he made me wonder about the Spanish-speaking enumerators in general, and if they are able to understand the training since it is presented in English. Are provisions being made for those enumerators who do not understand English well enough to actively participate in the training? Another challenge presented itself when we searched for a trailer park in a location currently occupied by a pharmacy. It appeared that the entire block was now commercially-zoned, but then we noticed a small shop that had a second story that looked suspiciously like a housing unit. We searched for an entrance, but only found one after speaking with a knowledgeable person. The entrance was right in the front of the store, but it was not obvious at first. The house didn't have a number on it, so the enumerator simply put a description of the house on the list. I'm not sure that the lister would have noticed that there was a living quarters on the second floor if I had not pointed out the apparent kitchen window.

I also attended a Crew Leader meeting, in which many issues were discussed. Sometimes on the address register, a sloppy check mark can look like a "C" which indicates that the address needs to be corrected.

The crew leaders have encountered situations where all of the information on the list matches with all the "official" information, but the street signs are wrong. The FOS instructed them, in situations like these, to always speak with a knowledgeable person to get the correct mailing address. He said "Remember the main purpose of this activity is to get the correct mailing address so that the Post Office can deliver the questionnaire to the correct house. If you keep this in mind when you encounter difficult situations, you will know what actions need to be taken." I was impressed with the FOS's ability to address the questions of his crew leaders and get the job done.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I believe that operations are proceeding as planned in the Tampa office, even though they got a late start. They have good leadership who are able to address unusual problems as they arise.

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